

***Regulation within an intimate relationship context:
Initiation and response strategies utilised in self,
partner and relationship regulation.***

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in
Psychology at the University of Canterbury

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2008**

Acknowledgments

A number of people have offered me support and kind words of encouragement during the production of this thesis. The first person I would like to acknowledge is my supervisor, Professor Garth Fletcher, thank you for always making time for me, challenging me and guiding me through this process and my other academic ventures. Secondly, I would like to thank all the participants of my studies, your honesty has made this work possible. Thirdly, to my friends thank you for keeping a smile on my dial and for always believing in me. And, finally, to Rich and all my family your support is endless, your faith unwavering and your perspectives priceless, I cannot thank you enough.

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Abstract

The Ideal Standards Model (Simpson, Fletcher and Campbell, 2001) suggests that individuals regulate themselves and their partners based on how closely their perceptions match their ideal standards. Overall, Fletcher and Simpson (2006) provided empirical support for the regulatory function of the Ideal Standards Model and concluded that standards which may initiate regulation reflect three pivotal domains; warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resources. In Study 1, 150 individuals (in heterosexual relationships or had been in the previous six months) spontaneously reported prior regulatory attempts that had focused on changing themselves, their partner or their relationship. Participants then described their most salient regulatory attempt in detail and rated the success of this attempt. In Study 2, 96 individuals (in heterosexual relationships) self-rated various personality and relationship characteristics. Participants also indicated how they would likely respond (using a set of likert scales) to partner initiated regulation attempts which were provided via vignette descriptions. As predicted, results indicated (a) that regulatory attempts reflect the pivotal domains of the Ideal Standards Model, (b) predicted gender differences in the use of regulation, (c) increased regulatory success with the use of interpersonal strategies and (d) increased relationship quality with less negative reactions to regulatory attempts. Results also indicated that women were more likely to respond negatively than men, particularly when the regulation attempt focused on their attractiveness. Implication and explanations are discussed.

Chapter One: Regulation in Intimate Relationships

Intimate relationships are essential for our survival as a species and play a pivotal role in our day-to-day well-being (Fletcher, 2002). One only needs to turn on the television or pick up a magazine to experience the overwhelming attention that society gives to romantic relationships and the scandals that attend them. Indeed, the study of intimate relationships has become a major research domain within (social) psychology.

One general finding from this research literature is that there are many psychological and physical benefits associated with being involved in (successful) intimate relationships (e.g. Reis and Franks, 1994). Thus, it is not surprising that people place a great deal of emphasis on trying to maintain and improve our intimate relationships (Fletcher, 2002). Overall et al. (2006) suggest that one of the main ways that we try to improve our intimate relationships is by regulating them. There are three main targets within an intimate relationship that may be regulated; the self, the partner and the relationship (aspects that involve the self and the partner as a unit). In all three instances, regulation involves attempting to change or alter the target in some way.

The current research examines this topic, specifically dealing with the nature and content of regulation attempts within intimate relationships and how partners respond to them. In the introduction, I will review the relevant literature and theoretical explanations of self, partner and relationship regulation. I will then give a detailed account of the Ideal Standards Model, emphasising how it is able to account

for regulation processes in intimate relationships. Finally, I will introduce the rationale for the current studies.

Self Regulation

Self-regulation (self-improvement in particular) is a topic that has received an incredible amount of attention both within ‘pop’ and academic psychology. This is evident in the countless ‘self-help’ guides written on almost every aspect imaginable and also in the large body of academic literature on the topic. There are several theories that deal with self regulation, but perhaps the most influential is that of Self-Discrepancy Theory.

Self-Discrepancy Theory postulates that large discrepancies between self-realties and self-ideals produce negative affect and lower self-esteem which motivates individuals to regulate themselves in some way, in order to reduce this discrepancy (e.g. Carver and Scheier, 1998 and Higgins, 1987, 1997). Using a self-discrepancy framework Moretti and Higgins (1998) investigated the specific tactics that individuals employ to reduce perceived discrepancies and found that promotion strategies (designed to make the individual fit more closely to ideals) and prevention strategies (designed to make sure the individual avoids not matching ideals) may be utilised depending on parental socialisation practices. Moretti and Higgins also show that discrepancies between how individuals believe they compare to the perceived standards held by significant people in their lives can also prompt regulation.

Robins and Boldero (2003) extended the work of Moretti and Higgins by specifically applying self-discrepancy concepts to intimate relationship contexts. They

concluded that more negative self-evaluation and reduced relationship stability are associated with higher self and partner discrepancies. This finding suggests that individuals' self-evaluations are in part influenced by their partners' perceptions. Interestingly, Robins and Boldero found that discrepancies commonly reflect issues concerned with intimacy, trust and relationship roles, suggesting that self and partner discrepancies in such domains may have detrimental outcomes for relationship stability.

Within an intimate relationship context, individuals experience negative self-evaluations when a discrepancy exists between either self or partner perceptions and self-standards or perceived partner-standards respectively, which trigger regulatory practices. (Robins and Boldero, 2003 and Moretti and Higgins, 1998). Self-Discrepancy Theory has been shown to be relevant in self-regulation and has been implicated in possible relationship outcomes. However, it fails to specifically address how and why individuals may attempt to regulate their partners or their relationships.

Partner Regulation

Research that has investigated the way that intimate partners try to change one another (partner regulation) has focused primarily on the ways in which individuals try to persuade their partner to their own point of view on a subject of disagreement (e.g. Orina, Wood and Simpson, 2002) or how individuals try to influence health-specific partner behaviours (e.g. Cohen and Lichtenstein, 1990 and Tucker and Muller, 2000). These kinds of studies generally conceptualise partner regulation in

terms of tactics that are described along continuums, but the way in which this is done varies considerably between studies.

Howard, Blumstein and Schwartz (1986) list six influence tactics (manipulation, supplication, bullying, autocracy, disengagement and bargaining) that are defined by strong versus weak and direct versus indirect dimensions. They found that their use is moderated by gender and the balance of power. Men were more likely to be in positions of strength in relationships and individuals in this position were more likely to engage in strong direct behaviour influence strategies (bullying and autocracy). Women on the other hand were more likely to be in positions of weakness in the relationship, and individuals in this position were more likely to engage in weak and indirect behaviour influence strategies (supplication and manipulation) (Howard et al).

Falbo and Peplau (1980), and Belk, Snell, Garcia-Falconi, Hernandez-Sanchez, Hargrove and Holtzman (1988) investigated the roles that power balance, gender, and gender-role orientation play in influence strategies and defined thirteen tactics that varied in terms of directedness (direct-indirect) and levels of interaction (bilateral-unilateral). These two studies found that heterosexual males were more likely to use bilateral direct strategies (e.g. reasoning) than females (in both America and Mexico) and that this pattern was magnified when one partner considers themselves as having more power and control in the relationship. Falbo and Peplau also found that bilateral direct strategies are associated with greater relationship satisfaction. These results are discussed with reference to gender differences in the structural power of heterosexual relationships. The authors explain that men tend to

have more structural power in heterosexual intimate relationships and therefore predict a high degree of influence success. In comparison, women have less structural power and therefore predict that their influence attempts will be unsuccessful. This difference in expected outcomes affects the influence strategies that individuals employ, resulting in men choosing a more confrontational and engaging approach and women choosing more subtle and independent strategies (Falbo and Peplau).

Orina et al. (2002) based their conceptualisation of partner influence strategies on Kelman's (1961) tripartite model and classified influence tactics as relationship referencing, coercion, and logic and reasoning. They investigated how partners spontaneously influenced each whilst discussing a relationship problem. Orina et al concluded that closeness in a relationship is associated with increased likelihood of employing strategies that reference the relationship, and that these strategies are more effective in altering the partner's point-of-view than those of coercion and logic and reasoning. Interpretation of these results utilised a social influence framework and suggested that the success of relationship referencing is accounted for by its ability to prime an individual's commitment to the relationship, forcing them to identify with the importance of maintaining the relationship (Orina et al).

Cohen and Lichtenstein (1990), on the other hand, describe ten partner-behaviour change tactics in intimate relationships that are classified along a positive versus negative dimension. They found that higher ratios of positive partner behaviours are better predictors of successful smoking abstinence than the frequency of positive behaviours alone. This result suggests that the context of relationships can mediate the effectiveness of regulation tactics (Cohen and Lichtenstein).

In a more recent study, that directly assessed attempts of partners in intimate relationships to change one another, 61 intimate couples were videotaped while attempting to produce a desired change in the partner (Overall, Fletcher and Simpson, in press). Taxometric analysis provided two tactic typologies; a positivity dimension and a directness dimension (Overall et al). This study generated 20 tactics that were conceptualised by 6 influence strategies; coercion and autocracy (negative-direct), manipulation and supplication (negative-indirect), rational reasoning (positive direct) and soft positive (positive-indirect). The results showed that, irrespective of positivity, use of more direct tactics resulted in more observable change over time in the partner. Thus, an important mechanism through which partner regulatory attempts may impact relationship outcomes is the extent to which the regulation is successful at eliciting the desired change (Overall et al).

Whilst the partner regulation literature shows considerable diversity in how specific regulation tactics are conceptualized, relatively little emphasis is given to explaining why individuals attempt to regulate their partners. Although Social Control Theory is not specific to intimate partner regulation it can be applied in this context.

Historically, it was Durkheim (1897 and 1951) who developed the foundations of Social Control Theory. Social Control Theory postulates that individuals regulate one another's behaviour to ensure compliance to societal norms (Tucker and Muller, 2000). Social control can be exerted both internally, through ones own feelings of responsibility towards others, and externally, by observably prompting others (Tucker and Muller). Social control within a partner regulation context therefore focuses on

external control tactics that attempt to regulate and constrain socially undesirable partner behaviours (Lewis and Butterfield, 2005). Lewis and Butterfield suggest that social control that is directed towards one's intimate partner may be more successful than social control exerted in other relationships because intimate partners may be more likely attributed the regulation to genuine concern and care.

There is an abundance of research that has addressed how intimate partners try to change one another. However, throughout this literature there is little consistency in methodology and how the resulting findings are conceptualised. Social Control Theory offers one possible explanation as to why partners try to change one another, but it fails to explain regulation that is focused on partner behaviour that would not be considered socially undesirable, or regulation that is directed at altering relationship dynamics.

Relationship Regulation

Relationship regulation involves change that directly affects both partners in an intimate relationship. Although it could be argued that self and partner regulation, described thus far, are interpersonal by nature, in an intimate relationship context relationship focused regulation can be considered a separate component. Research on relationship regulation can be divided into two categories investigating a) the cognitive processes involved in regulation, and b) the colossal amount of research on communication patterns in intimate relationships.

Cognitive regulatory strategies are considered a sub-type of relationship regulation because research has shown that individuals can regulate relationship

outcomes by the way that they conceptualise relationship events. Murray and Holmes (1999) suggest that relationship stability may depend on individuals forming integrative mental ties in their partner representations. According to Murray and Holmes this process involves minimising specific faults by associating problematic partner behaviours with more virtuous ones which, in turn increases relationship stability.

Another common cognitive strategy used within intimate relationships is to idealise ones partner by positively biasing perceptions of them (e.g., Murray, Holmes and Griffin, 1996 and Boyes and Fletcher, 2007). Murray et al found that not only did this strategy characterise stable and satisfying relationships but it also resulted in partners coming to share this idealised perception thus, actually creating the desired partner attributes. Fletcher, Simpson and Thomas (2000a) found that individuals may also adjust their expectations so that they are closer to partner and relationship realities. Fletcher et al. interpret this cognitive regulatory strategy as one way in which individuals increase the consistency between ideal and perceived standards (much like the aforementioned self-discrepancy model).

An important finding of the Fletcher et al., (2000) study is that individuals with greater consistency between ideal standards and actual perceptions also perceived that they had higher quality relationships, which predicted lower rates of relationship dissolution. Finally, Fletcher, Fincham, Cramer and Heron (1987) suggested that constructing internal attributions for relationship maintenance are causally related to relationship quality. Specifically, perceiving both partners as contributing equally to the maintenance of the relationship may be an important

attribution in maintaining relationship quality (Fletcher et al., 1987). It is plausible that all of these cognitive strategies are employed by intimate partners in order to successfully work through relationship problems, ensuring continued relationship satisfaction and security (Overall, Fletcher and Simpson, 2006).

Research has also shown that a number of personality and relationship characteristics are associated with the use of cognitive relationship regulation strategies. Collins (1996) concluded that secure attachment style is associated with attributing negative partner behaviours to unstable, specific and external explanations and Hammond and Fletcher (1991) associated this attachment style with increased relationship satisfaction over time. Gagne and Lydon (2004) reviewed many variables that influence the use of bias representations in intimate relationships. For example, low self-esteem hinders this process, ultimately leading to behaviour that degrades the quality of the relationship. Knee (1998) suggests that relationship theory beliefs provide yet another variable that influences relationship regulation. Specifically, Knee concluded that individuals who use work-it-out relationship theories are more likely to engage in regulation strategies in the first place, as a mechanism to promote the relationship as opposed to disengagement behaviours. This literature suggests that individual variables such as attachment style, self-esteem, and lay relationship theories, may influence the use of regulation strategies and subsequently may be associated with relationship outcomes.

As previously mentioned, a plethora of research has examined conflict in intimate relationships. This research has lead to the identification of specific conflict patterns that are associated with relationship outcomes (see Heyman, 2001, and

Gottman, 1998 for reviews). How intimate partners address conflict and communicate to one another during is relevant to relationship regulation because they are also intrinsically interpersonal. Importantly, particular communication strategies have been found to elicit different response strategies that are linked to varying degrees of relationship success (Overall et al., in press). Hence, individuals are able to use communication strategies as a way to regulate aspects of their relationships.

Klinetob and Smith (1996) offer an account of one communication pattern that has implications for relationship outcomes. Specifically, they found that when communication is initiated in a negative way, it tends to elicit defensive reactions and this pattern is associated with reduced relationship satisfaction. This work is consistent with Bradbury and Fincham (1991) who argue that negative interactions undermine the problem-solving process and thus degrade relationship satisfaction. Conversely, positive interactions foster the problem-solving process and are therefore related to increased relationship satisfaction (Bradbury and Fincham). Overall et al. (in press) provide further empirical support for the importance of communicative strategies in relationship outcomes. In this study 61 intimate couples were video-taped whilst trying to produce desired changes in one another. Overall et al found that change attempts perceived as more successful were associated with positive relationship outcomes over time, and that change was more successful when partners responded to change attempts in a diplomatic and positive fashion. An integration of these findings indicates that change attempts perceived as successful are associated with positive relationship outcomes, and that the success of regulatory attempts is a reflection of both how the agent communicates the attempt and how the target responds.

Interdependence Theory provides a general account for the findings previously described (Thibaut and Kelly, 1959). Interdependence Theory postulates that individuals assess their outcomes in terms of costs and benefits and in doing so formulate a cost-benefit ratio that is used as a comparison level (Thibaut and Kelly). The theory explains that regulatory strategies are mobilised when an individuals outcomes exceed his or her acceptable comparison level (Thibaut and Kelly). Interdependence Theory has served as a basis for many theoretical explanations of relationship regulation. Murray et al. (1996) offer one such explanation when they suggest that individuals use cognitive regulation strategies in an attempt to ensure the success of the relationship which, in turn protects any personal investments that they have made in the relationship. Interdependence Theory suggests that relationship regulation is a mechanism through which individuals attempt to maintain their relationships in order to protect the investments that they have made in them.

Self, partner and relationship regulation have all been shown to be prompted by discrepancies between perceptions and ideal standards, and various approaches to regulation in relationship contexts have been reviewed. Similar to Self-Discrepancy Theory and Interdependence Theory, The Ideal Standards Model provides an explanation of regulation using discrepancy principles. However, the model goes beyond these approaches in several ways that will now be outlined.

Ideal Standards Model

The foundations of the Ideal Standards Model were developed by Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas and Giles (1999) and have been supported and extended upon

many times (see Fletcher, Simpson and Thomas, 2000a; Simpson et al., 2001; Overall et al., 2006). These foundations are derived from social and evolutionary principles that are most clearly evident in the Strategic Pluralism Model of human mating (Gangestad and Simpson, 2000). The Strategic Pluralism Model suggests that humans have evolved a set of mating strategies that reflect their environments and require them to achieve a compromise in mate qualities between those that signal good genes (qualities of a good mate) and those that signal good investment (qualities of a good parent).

The Ideal Standards Model reflects this interaction between evolution and environment, and postulates that the standards people use in choosing mates are based on the search for qualities that reflect the twin need for good genes and good investment. The initial study of the Ideal Standards Model provided empirical evidence that individuals self-rated ideal partner qualities do in fact reflect a desire for both good genes and good investment. Specifically, Fletcher et al. (1999) found that ideal partner qualities could be best conceptualised in terms of three dimensions; warmth/trustworthiness incorporates personal qualities such as being kind and supportive, attractiveness/vitality includes attributes such as being attractive and healthy and status/resources describes qualities such as financial security and professional ambition.

Concerned with explaining the cognitive processes that are involved in intimate relationships, the Ideal Standards Model postulates that individuals possess cognitive representations of their ideal partner and relationship with respect to each of the three dimensions (Fletcher and Simpson, 2000). The consistency between ideal

standards and actual perceptions (termed ‘ideal-perception consistency’) is used to (a) evaluate current partners and relationships, (b) explain relationship events and (c) regulate the self, current partner and relationship.

The evaluative function of ideal standards has received considerably more attention in the literature than the explanatory and regulatory functions. Fletcher et al. (1999) found, as predicted, that higher ideal-perception consistency is linked to more positive partner and relationship evaluations, and the results of Fletcher et al. (2000a) show that this consistency is also associated with lower rates of relationship dissolution.

Interestingly, specific patterns in the importance placed on the three dimensions have also become well replicated (e.g. Fletcher et al., 2004 and Overall et al., 2006). These patterns include the findings that warmth/trustworthiness characteristics are the most important factors in partner and self-evaluations by both men and women, but that gender differences emerge in the importance placed on the other two dimensions (Fletcher et al., 2004). Specifically, women (relative to men) place more importance on status/resource characteristics in a potential mate and place less importance on attractiveness/vitality characteristics. This gender difference can be interpreted using the framework of the Parental Investment Theory which suggests that because women physically invest more in their offspring they therefore place greater importance on partner characteristics that will ensure that they are supported and provided for during this time (Fletcher et al., 2004).

Although there is a growing body of evidence to support the evaluative and explanatory aspects of the Ideal Standards Model, the regulatory function of ideal-perception consistency has received considerably less attention. Overall et al. (2006) offers the first concise account of regulation processes in intimate relationships using the framework of the Ideal Standards Model. This study is the first to have found gender differences operating within a regulatory context. Specifically, Overall et al showed that men direct self-regulation towards their status/resource characteristics as a reflection of the importance that their partners place on these attributes, and that women direct their self-regulation more towards attractiveness/vitality characteristics, reflecting the importance that their (male) partners place on these attributes. These results are congruent with previous research that has found similar gender differences in partner and self-ideal standards (see Fletcher et al., 2004 and Simpson, Fletcher and Campbell, 2001).

By focusing on cognitions and their associated behaviours, in addition to replicating gender differences in self-regulation, Overall et al. (2006) concluded that partners do in fact regularly desire and attempt to change their partners. Specifically, Overall et al found that lower ideal-perception consistency was associated with greater desires and attempts to change ones partner, and that these desires and attempts were (a) specific to the locus of discrepancy (self versus partner), (b) moderated by perceived regulatory success, (c) operational within the three dimensions of the Ideal Standards Model and (d) associated with relationship satisfaction.

Although Overall et al. (2006) provide important and unique evidence that supports and extends the Ideal Standards Model, this study does not address the gap in the literature regarding the identification of content-specific regulatory strategies, their respective effectiveness, or their role in all three regulatory foci (self, partner and relationship).

Overview of the Current Studies

The purpose of the first study was two-fold. First, by generating unprompted recollections of regulation, Study 1 was designed to further test the centrality of the three dimensions that underpin the Ideal Standards Model. Second, Study 1 was designed to identify specific regulatory strategies in self, partner and relationship regulation. To address the limitations of previous research, Study 1 elicited descriptions of specific regulatory strategies and assessed their comparative success, importantly giving equal weighting to self, partner and relationship regulation. The second study was designed to investigate the opposite side of regulation within an intimate relationship context, that of the individual's responses to partner-initiated change attempts. Study 2 also investigated the role of gender and various personality and relationship variables in terms of positive and negative responses to the partners' change attempts.

Chapter Two: Study One

In Study 1, 150 heterosexual men and women answered open-ended questions relating to ways that they had tried to change either themselves, their partners, or their relationships in the previous six months. In addition, all participants were asked to rate how successful their most important change attempt was. Thus, the study consisted of three between-participant experimental conditions. This design allowed participants' spontaneous recollections of regulation attempts to be coded into the three dimensions specified by the Ideal Standards Model, their most important regulatory attempt to be categorised by the specific tactics they employed, and the success of this strategy to be investigated.

Study 1 tested four main hypotheses. First, I predicted that participants' spontaneous recollections of regulatory attempts in all three experimental conditions would be mostly framed in terms of warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, and status/resource dimensions, consistent with the Ideal Standards Model. Second, consistent with prior research that has used structured scales, it was predicted that regulation of the warmth/trustworthiness items would be reported most frequently, followed by the remaining two categories. Third, specific gender differences were predicted, based on prior research and theories, as described in the general introduction. Specifically, it was hypothesised that in the self-regulation condition men would report more status/resource focused change attempts than women, and women would report more attractiveness/vitality focused change attempts than men. In contrast, in the partner-regulation condition, the reverse pattern was expected; namely, men should report more attractiveness/vitality focused change attempts than women, whereas women were expected to report more status/resource focused change

attempts than men. This pattern of results is predicted on the basis that individuals are aware of the opposite genders' hierarchical structure of ideal mate qualities.

I also predicted that the importance that men and women placed on regulation attempts would follow this same pattern, reflecting gender differences in the importance placed on self and partner regulation in the attractiveness/vitality and status/resource domains. Finally, it was hypothesised that interpersonal tactics used in self, partner and relationship regulation attempts would be perceived to be more successful than intrapersonal tactics.

Study One: Method

Participants

Seventy five men and seventy five women who were either currently involved in a heterosexual intimate relationship, or who had been involved in such a relationship in the last six months, were recruited through email advertisements at the University of Canterbury. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 52 years, with a mean age of 22.78 years ($SD = 5.54$ years). Of the sample 20.9% of participants currently identified as being single, 45.9% as dating, 24.3% as living with their partner, 0.7% indicated that their relationship was considered to be a civil union and 8.1% were married. The mean length of relationships was 30.91 months ($SD = 49.21$ months).

Materials

Two open-ended questions were devised in order to elicit free response descriptions of regulation attempts. Question one asked participants to list the ways in which they had

tried to change aspects of themselves, their partner or their relationship (depending on the experimental condition). These responses were independently coded by two blind coders into one of four categories; warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality, status/resources (based on descriptions provided by Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas and Giles, 1999) and other (for those regulatory attempts that did not fall into the aforementioned categories). For the purposes of this study the intimacy/loyalty and relationship passions descriptors discussed by Fletcher et al. (1999) were included in the warmth/trustworthiness and attractiveness/vitality categories respectively (see Appendix 1). The two coders coded the items in a reliable fashion (Cohen's $\kappa = 0.81$) with any discrepancies discussed and agreed upon. Final data were converted into percentages for each of the four categories.

Question two asked participants to choose the most important change attempt that they had listed in response to question one and give a detailed description of how they went about this change attempt. The same two coders, who remained blind to the experimental condition, also coded these responses. The descriptions were first analysed and broken down into the smallest units that made up the response, by one of the coders (the author). These units were then independently coded into one of three categories by both coders; intra-personal self (strategies that only referenced the involvement of the participant), intra-personal partner (strategies that only referenced the involvement of the participants partner) and interpersonal (strategies that indicated an interaction between the participant and their partner). This coding scheme was also found to be reliable (Cohens $\kappa = 0.97$).

A structured scale was devised to measure how successful participants perceived the change attempt that they had described in detail in question two. Participants were asked to indicate, on a set of seven point Likert scales (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely), their answers to

the following four questions; How positive were the strategies that you used to bring about change? How successful were the strategies that you used to bring about change? How positively did your partner perceive that strategies you used to bring about change? How successful did your partner perceive the change attempt to be? This measure demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$). Thus, the four items were summed and averaged to give an overall indication of perceived success.

Procedure

Experiment session times were held in a small laboratory setting with participants arriving during a session at a time that was convenient to them. Upon arrival participants were randomly allocated (within gender) to one of three conditions: self, partner or relationship focused change attempts. Participants were seated at individual desks that were placed in a configuration to allow for privacy. Participants were then given general information about the study and their consent was obtained by completing the questionnaire. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study up to the point when their questionnaire was submitted as the questionnaires were anonymous and could not identified or retrieved. Upon completion of the study, participants deposited their questionnaires into a locked box and were given a debriefing form and NZ\$5 university café voucher for their participation.

Study One: Results

Descriptive Statistics and Overall ANOVA

Two participants were excluded from analyses, as the participants had not listed any change attempts in question one. Participants listed a total of 539 ($M = 3.64$ $SD = 1.72$) regulation items. Table 1 displays the findings, converted to

percentages, for each category according to gender. As predicted, the bulk of the free-response items were coded into the three categories (92.5 %).

Table 1. Percentage of Regulatory Focus between Gender and Experimental Condition.

	Men			Women		
	Self (%)	Partner (%)	Relationship (%)	Self (%)	Partner (%)	Relationship (%)
Warmth/Trustworthiness	32	28	65	47	41	53
Attractiveness/Vitality	30	39	18	41	21	22
Status/Resources	25	5	3	11	14	7

A 2 (gender) x 3 (self vs. partner vs. relationship focus) x 3 (regulatory dimension- warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resources) ANOVA, with a within-participant final factor, was calculated. This analysis produced a significant main effect of regulatory dimension $F(2,141) = 51.10$ $p < 0.01$, a significant two-way interaction between regulatory dimension and experimental condition $F(1,142) = 7.48$, $p < 0.01$) and a significant three-way interaction $F(4, 282) = 4.24$, $p < 0.01$. No other effects were significant. These significant effects were expected and will now be discussed in more detail.

Significant Main Effect

The significant main effect of regulatory dimension suggests that the percentage differences shown in Table 1 are significantly different between the groups overall. As predicted, regulation attempts were able to be categorised by the three dimensions specified in the Ideal Standards Model (Fletcher et al., 1999). Overall,

warmth/trustworthiness focused change attempts were the most commonly reported (50%), attractiveness/vitality focused were the second most commonly reported (31.3%) and status/resource focused change attempts were the third most commonly reported (11.2%). Only 7.5% of all the responses were unable to be categorised by the three dimensions of the Ideal Standards Model. This pattern of results is congruent with previous findings and is in line with predictions of the Ideal Standards Model (e.g. Fletcher et al., 2000b).

Significant Two-way Interaction Effect

The significant two-way interaction effect shows that the observed pattern of regulatory attempts (see Table 1) was more heavily weighted in the relationship focused condition (see Figure 1). This may be because attractiveness/vitality and status/resources characteristics are inherently to do with individuals, resulting in them being reported less in the relationship focused condition.

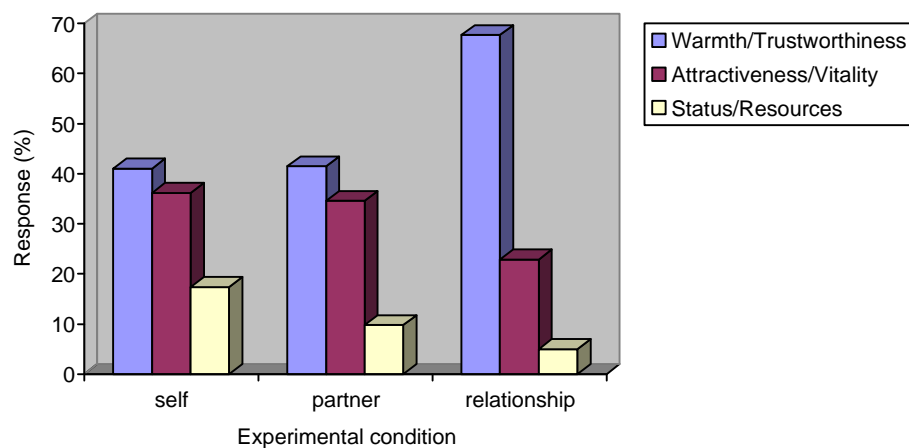


Figure 1. Two-way interaction (experimental condition \times regulatory dimension) ($F(1,142) = 7.48$ $p < 0.01$).

Significant Three-way Interaction Effect

As predicted, the significant three-way interaction was found to be driven by sex differences of regulatory efforts directed at status/resource and attractiveness/vitality between experimental conditions, shown in Figure 2. These results suggest that when males reported an attractiveness/vitality change attempt it was more likely to be focused at changing their partner's attractiveness/vitality characteristics than their own (see Figure 2). Figure 2 also shows that when males mentioned a status/resource change attempt it was more likely to be focused on changing their own status/resource than that of their partners. In comparison, females displayed the opposite pattern.

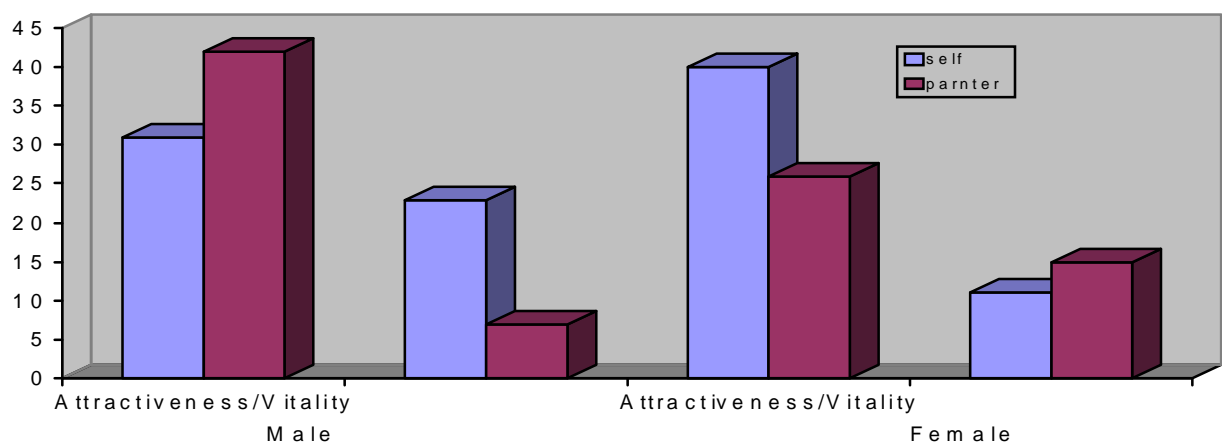


Figure 2. *Three-way interaction between experimental condition x gender x regulatory dimension* $F(4, 282) = 4.24, p < 0.01$.

Figures 1 and 2 suggest that regulatory rates within the three dimensions are a function of both the focus of the regulation and gender. The results of the three-way interaction suggest that individuals are aware that their partners differentiate the importance of their attributes in a sex-typed fashion and they attempt to regulate themselves accordingly.

Self-perceptions of Regulation

Data concerning what participants considered their most important change attempt (Question 2) gives an additional test for the hypothesis that men and women will differ in the importance that they place on self and partner characteristics. Two chi square analyses were used to analyze the frequency data of status/resource and attractiveness/vitality nominations. As predicted significant differences were found when comparing men and women in the self and partner regulation conditions $\chi^2(1, N = 107) = 7.07, p < 0.01$ and $\chi^2(1, N = 79) = 7.16, p < 0.01$ respectively. Specifically, in the self-regulation condition, men were more likely to indicate that they considered a status/resource change attempt (33%) to be their most important, compared to 4.3% of women. However, women in this condition were more likely to nominate an attractiveness/vitality change attempt (52.2%) than men (23.8%). When asked about their most important partner-focused change attempts men were more likely to nominate an attractiveness/vitality change attempt (50.1%), compared to 18.2% of women. However, women in this condition were more likely to nominate a status/resource change attempt (22.7%), compared to men (6.3%). These results again indicate that individuals may be aware of the value that their partners place on specific attributes in sex-stereotypical ways, and seek to regulate themselves accordingly.

Perceived Success of Regulatory Attempts

To test the hypothesis that interpersonal regulation strategies would be perceived as more successful than intrapersonal strategies, descriptions of the most important change attempt were categorised as being interpersonal (referencing the involvement of themselves and their partner) or intrapersonal (referencing only

themselves or only their partner). These tactic frequencies were correlated with perceived success within experimental conditions. Table 2 shows that across all three conditions, higher frequencies of intra-personal regulation strategies negatively correlated with perceived success, whereas more interpersonal strategies (those that also incorporated partner support) positively correlated with perceived success. Although correlations in the self and relationship conditions were not significant, the pattern remains consistent across the experimental conditions.

Table 2. Correlations (*r*) between Interpersonal and Intrapersonal Strategy Use and Perceived Regulatory Success.

Experimental Condition	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal
Self	-.13	.11
Partner	-.36*	.33*
Relationship	-.11	.10

* $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

Study One: Discussion

The results from Study 1 provide general support for the Ideal Standards Model. As predicted, most of the participants' spontaneous recollections of regulatory attempts were categorised reliably into the three dimensions of the model. Importantly, these regulatory descriptions were unprompted (previous research has used structured scales in forced-choice designs) providing compelling evidence in support of the dimensional framework of the Ideal Standards Model.

Results of Study 1 also showed the expected patterns of regulation recall. Specifically, warmth/trustworthiness-focused regulation attempts were reported the most, followed by attractiveness/vitality and status/resource. In addition, men reported more status/resource self-focused regulation and more attractiveness/vitality partner-

focused regulation than women, and women reported more attractiveness/vitality self-focused regulation and more status/resource partner-focused regulation than men. These results suggest that individuals are aware that their partners differentiate attributes in ways that reflect sex-role stereotypes. Interestingly, this awareness appears to translate into behaviour, as Study 1 also demonstrated that individuals place heightened importance and are more actively involved in self-regulation in a way that mirrors what they perceive as their partners' main concerns.

In general, the results of Study 1 provide support for the predictions of the Ideal Standards Model, but they also suggest that regulation within an intimate relationship context involves complex interpersonal processes that influence where individuals direct their regulatory attempts and how successful these attempts may be. However, the experimental design of Study 1 allowed regulation to be investigated from one point of view, that of the initiator of regulation. Given the interpersonal and dynamic nature of regulation in this context, Study 2 is designed to redress this limitation by investigating individuals' responses to partner-initiated regulation.

Chapter Three: Study Two

Study 2 was designed to investigate regulation in an intimate relationship context from the receiver's point of view. Specifically, Study 2 explored how individuals respond to partner initiated regulation attempts and what personality and relationship variables might influence their responses. A sample of men and women (who were currently in heterosexual romantic relationships) completed a number of measures of personality traits (including; Implicit Theories of Relationships, Self-Esteem, and Adult Attachment scales) and relationship characteristics (including; self-perceived Mate Value and Perceived Relationship Quality scales). These scales were specifically chosen to provide measures of potential moderating influences on responses to regulation.

Participants then read three specifically designed vignettes (in a counterbalanced within-participant design) describing partner initiated change attempts. Each vignette described a partner-initiated change attempt that focused on changing either the participant's warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality or status/resource attributes. The inclusion of an attribute from each of the three ideal mate dimensions (from the Ideal Standards Model) made the investigation of the predicted gender differences possible. Participants were asked to indicate how they would be likely to respond to each regulation attempt. The response scales were devised from Overall, Fletcher and Simpson (in press) and allowed participants to give independent ratings of response strategies that differed in both positivity and directness.

Overall et al. (2006) found that relationship satisfaction was negatively associated with increased partner focused regulatory attempts, suggesting that regulatory attempts communicate dissatisfaction to ones partner. However, Lewis and Butterfield (2005) suggest that this kind of regulation may also elicit positive attributions from ones partner and therefore be successful. In a later study (Overall et al., in press) found that if partners respond positively to regulation attempts, this is associated with more success over time in self-regulation. The sample in Study 2, quite typically, were generally happy in their relationships. I therefore predicted that participants would generally respond in a positive fashion to partner-initiated change attempts. In addition, I also predicted that a number of variables would influence responses.

First, because men and women differ in the importance that they place on attractiveness/vitality and status/resource characteristics, both for themselves and their partners, I predicted that gender differences would emerge in the use of negative response-strategies in these conditions. Specifically, I hypothesised that women would respond more negatively to attractiveness/vitality change attempts, and that men would respond more negatively to status/resource change attempts.

Second, I hypothesised I expected that the use of negative-response strategies in these particular conditions would be alleviated if the individual had more secure attachment styles, higher self-esteem, higher self-perceived mate value ratings in the congruent domain, and held a more work-it-out relationship theory. For example, women that have a secure attachment style, high self-esteem, positive self-perceptions of their attractiveness/vitality, and hold a work-it-out relationship theory, should be

less likely to respond negatively to attractiveness/vitality change attempts than those who do not.

Finally, consistent with the work of Bradbury and Fincham (1991) and Overall et al (in press), I predicted that more positive responses would be associated with greater relationship quality, and the use of more negative responses would be associated with lower relationship quality.

Study Two: Method

Participants

Forty-eight males and forty-eight females who were currently in heterosexual intimate relationships were recruited by paper advertisements at the University of Canterbury. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 31 years and had a mean age of 21.45 years ($SD = 2.34$ years). Of the sample 85.4% indicated that they were dating, 11.5% were living with their partner and 3.11% were married. The mean relationship length was 20.70 months ($SD = 22.15$ months).

Materials

Several personality and relationship measures were incorporated into the study in order to assess relationship quality and personality characteristics. Three vignettes that described a partner initiated change attempt were designed for the study.

Relationship Quality

The short version of the Perceived Relationship Quality Components demonstrates good internal reliability and predictive validity (Fletcher et al., 2000a, 2000b) and was

included to assess the quality of the participants' intimate relationships. This version consists of six items, measured by Likert scales (1 = not at all, 7 = extremely), that directly measure each component of relationship quality; satisfaction, commitment, intimacy, trust, passion and love. Participants were asked to indicate their answer to each of the six items with reference to their current intimate relationship (e.g., How satisfied are you with your relationship?) The six items were summed and averaged to provide an overall indication of relationship quality, with higher scores indicating greater quality. This measure demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach alpha = 0.76).

Relationship Theory

The Implicit Theory of Relationships scale (Knee, 1998) was included in the study to measure participants' degree of destiny and growth beliefs towards intimate relationships. This scale has demonstrated good internal reliability and external validity (Knee). This scale consists of eight items, measured by Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The first four items measure destiny beliefs and the final four items measure growth beliefs. Participants were asked to indicate their answer each of the eight items with reference to their intimate relationships in general (e.g. Potential relationship partners are either compatible or they are not). The destiny and growth items were summed and averaged separately, generating two overall indications of relationship beliefs, with higher scores reflecting a stronger identification with that belief. These measures of destiny belief and growth belief, however, demonstrated questionable internal reliability (Cronbach alphas = 0.48 and 0.57 respectively).

Self-esteem

Rosenberg's (1965) Self-esteem scale was included to assess participants' global feelings of self-worth. The self-esteem scale consists of ten items, measured by Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the ten items concerning themselves (e.g. I feel that I am a person of worth, at least on equal plane with others.). The ten items were coded so that higher scores indicated higher self-esteem. They were then summed and average to give an overall indication of self-esteem. This measure demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach alpha = 0.88).

Attachment

The Adult Attachment Questionnaire (Simpson, Rholes and Phillips, 1996) was included in the study to measure the participants' attachment styles in a continuous fashion. This scale has demonstrated good internal reliability and external validity (Simpson et al., 1996). This questionnaire consists of 17 items, measured by Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Items a through to e compile a secure attachment scale, f through to I an avoidant scale and j through r an anxious attachment scale. Reliability analysis of the secure attachment scale revealed that item 3 possessed an unsatisfactory corrected item-total correlation of -0.06, resulting in this item being excluded from further analyses. With item three omitted, the Cronbach alpha for the secure attachment scale was 0.42. Reliability analysis of the anxious attachment scale revealed a satisfactory Cronbach alpha of 0.75, and similar analysis also revealed satisfactory reliability for the avoidance scale (Cronbach alpha = 0.73).

Participants were asked to indicate their answer to each of the seventeen items with reference to their intimate relationships in general (e.g. I find it relatively easy to get close to others). Data were positively coded so that higher scores represented higher attachment resulting in mean scores for each of the three attachment categories. In accordance with standard procedures (see Simpson et. al, 1996) an avoidance attachment dimension was created by subtracting mean secure attachment scores from mean avoidance scores. Thus, higher scores on this dimension reflected more avoidance and lower scores higher security.

Self-perceived Mate Value

Participants self-perceived mate value was measured using the seventeen items of the short forms of Partner Ideal Scales (Fletcher et al., 1999). This scale has demonstrated good internal reliability and external validity (Fletcher et al., 1999). The self-perceived mate value items, measured by Likert scales (1 = very inaccurate, 7 = very accurate), reflect the three mate evaluation dimensions; warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness and vitality and status and resources. Participants indicated how accurately each item described their own characteristics (e.g. kind, attractive appearance, financially secure-or potential to achieve). The items for each dimension were summed and average separately, generating three overall indications of self-perceived mate value, with higher scores reflecting a stronger identification with that dimension. These self-perceived measures of warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resources demonstrated good internal reliability (Cronbach alphas = 0.78, 0.81 and 0.76 respectively).

Vignettes

Three vignettes were designed to depict a partner initiated regulatory attempt for each of the three dimensions (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status resources).

The vignette used to depict a warmth/trustworthiness focused change attempt was as follows – *Imagine that your partner wants you to become more sensitive to their needs. Imagine that you have become aware for a while that your partner believes you fall short in this way, and he or she initiates a conversation with you about this problem.* This description was then followed with the following instructions- *The following items describe various ways that you might react to this conversation, some positive and some negative. Please answer each item as truthfully and accurately as you can. Circle one number on each scale.* The three vignettes were identical except for the description of the focus of the regulatory attempt. The descriptions of the regulation attempts for the attractiveness/vitality and status/resources vignettes (respectively) are as follows – *Imagine that your partner wants you to become more physically attractive,* and *Imagine that your partner wants you to become more ambitious.*

After reading each vignette participants indicated how they would be likely to respond using fifteen response strategy descriptions. These response strategies were derived from Overall et. al, (in press). The fifteen response strategies, measured by Likert scales (1 = very unlikely , 7 = very likely), directly measured two dimensions of communication; positivity and directness. These measures divided the response strategies into four categories; positive indirect (e.g. I would encourage my partner to express his or her feelings about the issue), positive direct (e.g. I would help my partner see the situation from my point of view), negative indirect (e.g. I would make my partner feel guilty, and negative direct (e.g. I would argue with my partner) (see appendix 2 for a full description). The results for each response category were summed and averaged giving overall scores for each of the four categories. These four categories showed good internal reliability (Cronbach's alphas = 0.66, 0.74, 0.80 and 0.88 respectively).

Procedure

The experiment was completed in one session time in a small study room setting with participants arriving at a time that was convenient to them. Upon arrival, participants were seated at individual desks that were placed in the best configuration to allow for privacy. Participants were then given general information about the study and were informed that they could withdraw from the study until their questionnaire was submitted, as the questionnaires were anonymous and could not be retrieved after such a time. Participants were randomly allocated a questionnaire that had the vignettes presented in a counterbalanced design. Upon completion of the study, participants deposited their questionnaires into a locked box and were given a debriefing form and NZ \$5 university café voucher for their participation.

Study Two: Results

Descriptive Statistics

The means and standard deviations for the independent variables are shown in Table 3. These results, reassuringly, indicate remarkable similarities between men and women on all of the scales used in Study 2.

Table 3. Means and Standard Deviations of Personality and Relationship Scales.

	Total	Men	Women
Relationship Quality	5.74 (0.78)	5.62 (0.75)	5.87 (0.80)
Destiny Relationship Theory	4.50 (0.95)	4.71 (0.87)	4.31 (1.00)
Growth Relationship Theory	5.30 (0.88)	5.08 (0.76)	5.50 (0.94)
Self-esteem	5.60 (0.89)	5.90 (0.82)	5.34 (0.89)
Anxious Attachment	3.17 (0.97)	2.92 (0.78)	3.43 (1.08)
Avoidance Attachment	-1.34 (1.97)	-1.22 (1.93)	-1.49 (2.02)
Self-perceived warmth/trustworthiness	5.50 (0.78)	5.21 (0.78)	5.76 (0.63)
Self-perceived attractiveness/vitality	5.10 (0.88)	5.31 (.088)	4.89 (0.83)
Self-perceived status/resources	5.50 (0.94)	5.50 (1.05)	5.49 (0.80)

Note: Data are derived from the Perceived Relationship Quality Components, Implicit Theory of Relationships, Self-esteem, Adult Attachment Questionnaire and Self-perceived Mate Value Scales.

Manipulation Checks

To examine the integrity of the four response strategy categories (positive indirect, positive direct, negative indirect and negative direct) correlational analyses were conducted to assess the convergent and discriminant validity of each of the four categories. Table 4 displays correlations amongst the four categories of response strategies. These results suggest that the four categories are better conceptualised using the positivity dimension alone. Validity checks demonstrated good convergent

validity of the strategies positivity and negativity ($r = 0.43$ and 0.66) and poor convergent validity of the strategies directness ($r = 0.23$ and -0.11). Means and Standard Deviations of positive and negative response strategy use for men and women are shown in Table 5.

Table 4. Convergent and Discriminant Validity of Response Strategy Categories.

	Positive Indirect	Positive Direct	Negative Indirect	Negative Direct
Positive Indirect	1.00	0.43(**)	0.23	-0.09
Positive Direct	-	1.00	0.00	-0.11
Negative Indirect	-	-	1.00	0.66(**)
Negative Direct	-	-	-	1.00

** Correlations significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Means and Standard Deviations of Response Strategy for Men and Women

	Men		Women	
	Positive Response Strategy	Negative Response Strategy	Positive Response Strategy	Negative Response Strategy
Sensitivity	5.12 (0.87)	3.00 (1.00)	5.30 (0.74)	3.24 (1.20)
Attractiveness	5.12 (0.92)	3.20 (1.24)	4.29 (0.98)	4.80 (1.25)
Ambition	5.22 (0.79)	3.00 (0.94)	5.20 (0.74)	3.64 (1.21)

Response Strategy Use and Gender

A 2 (gender) x 2 (response strategy- positive and negative) x 3 (regulatory domain- sensitivity, attractiveness and ambition) ANOVA, with the last two factors as within-participant, was conducted. This analysis produced a significant main effect for response strategy use $F(2,94) = 187.25, p < 0.01$, a significant main effect for regulatory domain $F(2,93) = 3.73, p < 0.05$, a significant two-way interaction for response strategy and gender $F(2,94) = 21.97, p < 0.01$, a significant two-way interaction for response strategy and regulatory domain $F(2,93) = 28.66, p < 0.01$ and a significant three-way interaction $F(2, 93) = 18.33, p = 0.01$. These results were expected and each will now be discussed in more detail.

Significant Main Effects

The significant main effect for response strategy use suggests that positive and negative response strategies were utilised differently by the participants. Table 5 indicates that participants generally tended to respond positively (opposed to negatively) to partner-initiated change attempts. The significant main effect for regulatory domain indicates that participants differentiated their use of positive and negative response strategies between experimental conditions as is shown in Table 5. Overall, Men responded more positively ($M = 5.16, SD = 0.72$) than negatively ($M = 3.04, SD = 0.90$). In a similar fashion, women also responded more positively ($M = 4.92, SD = 0.58$) than negatively ($M = 3.40, SD = 0.95$).

Significant Two-way Interactions

The first significant two-way interaction (between response strategy and gender), as shown in Figure 3 suggests that men and women differ in how they

respond to partner-initiated change attempts. Figure 3 and Table 5 indicate that women utilised negative response strategies more often than men did. The second significant two-way interaction, as shown in Figure 4 (between response strategy and regulatory domain) suggests that positive and negative response strategy frequency differed between sensitivity, attractiveness and ambition focused change attempts. Figure 4 and Table 5 shows very similar patterns of responding across the three regulatory domains except in females response to attractiveness focused change attempts. This gender specific result is explored in more detail by the significant three-way interaction.

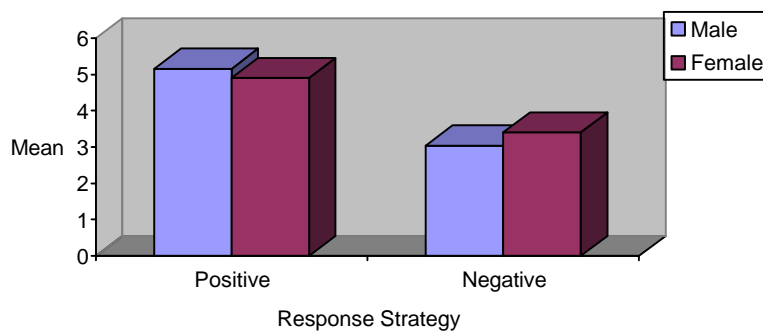


Figure 3. *Two-way interaction gender \times response strategy $F(2,94) = 21.97, p < 0.01$.*

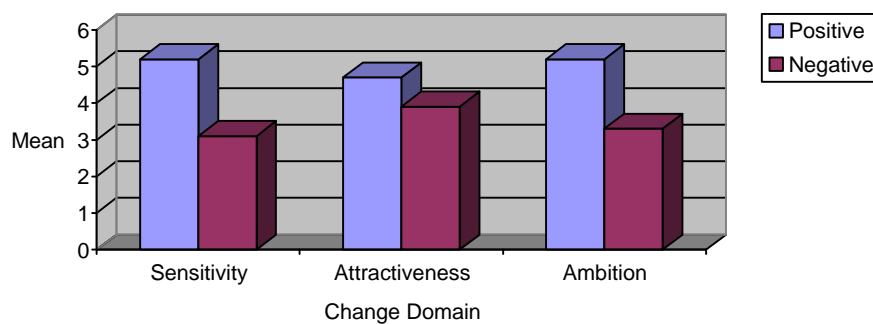


Figure 4. *Two-way interaction response strategy \times change domain.*

Significant Three-way Interaction

I predicated that participants would respond positively to regulation attempts, but that the significant three-way interaction would be driven by gender differences in the use of response strategies in the attractiveness and ambitiousness domains. Specifically, I predicted that men would respond more negatively (opposed to positively) to regulation that focused on changing their ambition and that women would respond negatively (opposed to positively) to regulation that focused on changer their attractiveness. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the significant three-way interaction and in doing so provide partial support for these hypotheses.

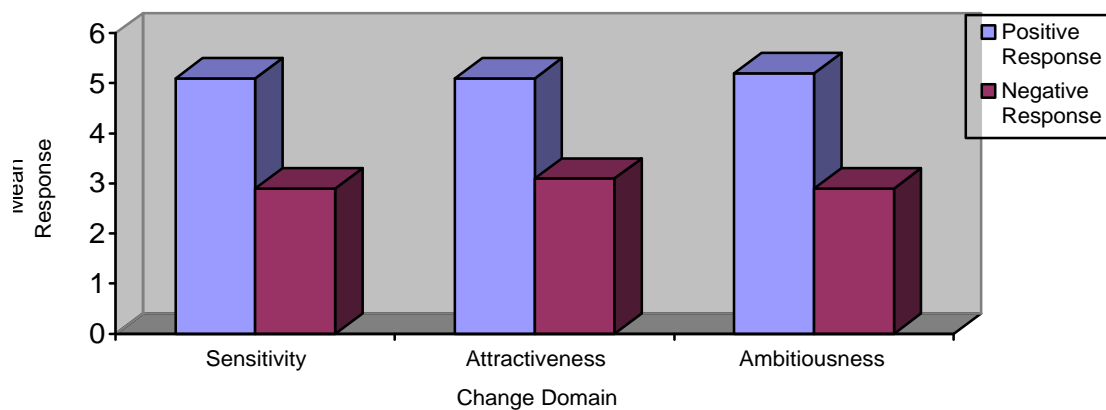


Figure 5. Mean response strategy use by men.

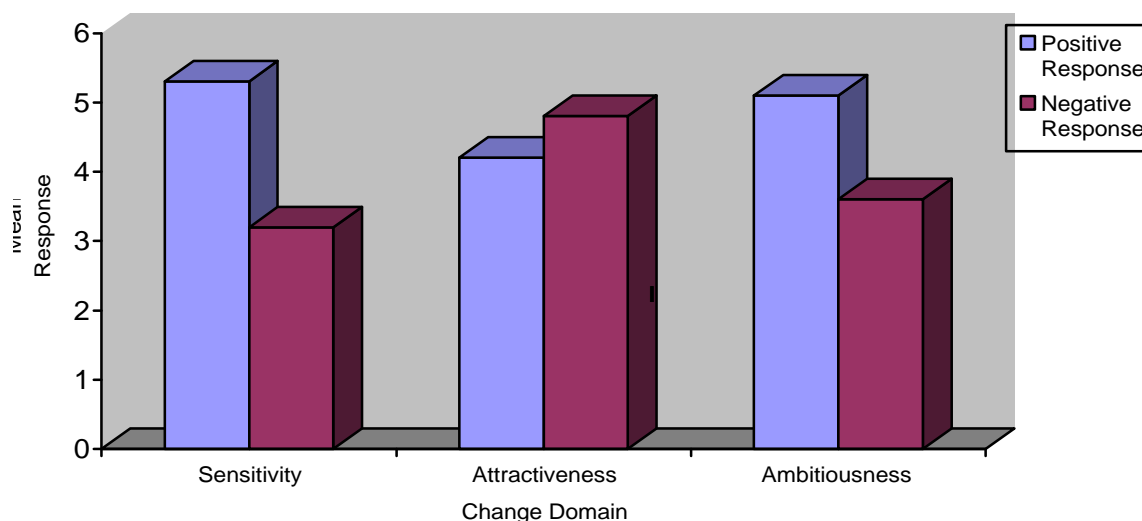


Figure 6. Mean response strategy use by women.

Planned comparisons t-tests were used to test the prediction that in each of the three regulatory domains positive response strategies were utilised more frequently than negative response strategies. All t-tests were significant, in that participants were more likely to respond positively than negatively to regulatory attempts, except for females responses to attractiveness partner-initiated change attempts $t(47) = -1.949, p = .057$. As predicated, these findings suggest that in general men and women responded positively to partner initiated regulation. In addition, as predicted, these results show that women are more likely to use negative response strategies than men $t(94) = -4.50, p = 0.00$ specifically in response to attractiveness/vitality focused change attempts. However, this gender specific pattern was not repeated for men in the status/resource condition as hypothesised.

Moderation Analysis

Hierarchical multiple regression analyses were carried out to investigate the possible moderating influence of the personal and relationship variables in response strategy use. In each analysis, the dependent variable was response strategy, either

positive or negative and the independent variables consisted of destiny relationship theory, growth relationship theory, self-esteem, avoidance attachment, anxious attachment and self-perceived mate value for the congruent dimensions. None of these analyses revealed significant moderation effects for any of the personality and relationship variable combinations taken separately.

Correlation Analysis – Main Effects

Table 6 presents a correlation matrix of the personality and relationship measures use, including response strategies. In line with previous research, more secure attachment (i.e. low avoidance attachment) was significantly associated with greater relationship quality. Also consistent with previous research, higher self-esteem is associated most strongly with higher self-perceived attractiveness/vitality followed by self-perceived status/resources and relationship quality is positively associated with self-perceived warmth/trustworthiness (refer to Table 6).

Contrary to predictions, holding a growth theory of relationships does not appear to be associated to the use of positive response strategies. In fact the opposite appears to be indicated as destiny theory of relationships shows a significant positive relationship with positive responses to partner initiated change attempts (refer to Table 6). This finding contradicts Knee's (1998) descriptions of likely responses to change attempts based on an individuals implicit relationship theory (as mentioned in the general introduction). It is possible that the hypothetical nature of the regulation vignettes were not salient enough to trigger participants' relationship schema (as discussed by Knee) and therefore did not provide a valid design to test this relationship.

Table 6 also shows that self-esteem and self-perceived attractiveness/vitality were significantly correlated to the use of positive response strategies. Specifically, higher self-esteem and higher self-perceived attractiveness/vitality were associated with increased positive response strategy use. Prior research suggests that self-esteem and self-perceived attractiveness/vitality are linked, so a multiple regression was carried out to determine the specific influence of these variables on the use of positive response strategies while also controlling for gender. As can be seen in Table 7, self-esteem remained the only significant predictor of positive response strategy use when all other associated variables were controlled for. This result suggests that higher self-esteem may predict positive response strategy use.

Finally, Table 6 shows the predicted positive association between relationship quality and the use of positive response strategies, and a significant negative association between relationship satisfaction and negative response strategy use. Although, the positive association between relationship quality and positive response strategy use, shown in Table 6, does not meet statistical significance importantly it is in the opposite direction to that shown with negative response strategy use. These are correlations, so no casual conclusions can be drawn. However, they do provide additional support for the conclusion that fulfilling relationships are characterised by positive and nurturing interactions (Bradbury and Fincham, 1991).

Table 6. Correlation Matrix of Variables in Study 2.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
(1)Relationship Quality	-										
(2)Implicit Theory Relationship: Destiny	.19	-									
(3)Implicit Theory Relationship: Growth	.05	.12	-								
(4)Total Self Esteem	-.05	.07	.14	-							
(5)Anxious Attachment	-.20	-.03	-.08	-.37**	-						
(6)Avoidance Attachment	-.38**	.04	-.01	-.23*	.25*	-					
(7)Self Perceived Warmth/Trustworthiness	.35**	.10	.33**	-.03	.01	-.21*	-				
(8)Self Perceived Attractiveness/Vitality	-.14	.09	.22*	.44**	-.17	-.00	.01	-			
(9)Self Perceived Status/Resources	.06	.13	.19	.35**	-.12	-.01	.15	.38**	-		
(10)Positive Response Strategy	.17	.21*	.13	.33**	-.16	-.03	.02	.23*	.14	-	
(11)Negative Response Strategy	-.20*	-.04	.05	-.14	.19	.19	-.06	.02	.01	-.06	-

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 7. Standardised Regression Coefficients in Multiple Regression with Positive Response-Strategy Use as the Dependent Variable

	Beta	Correlation	Significance level
Gender	-.04	-0.17	0.69
Destiny Implicit Theory of Relationships	0.18	0.21	0.08
Self-Esteem	0.23	0.30	0.04
Self-Perceived Attractiveness/Vitality	0.01	0.24	0.33
$R^2 = 0.14, p < 0.01$			

Study 2: Discussion

Study 2 investigated individuals' responses to specific partner-initiated regulation attempts and the possible individual and relationship variables that may influence these response. The results indicated that response strategies may be best conceptualised by dimensions of positivity, regardless of directness. In general, individuals responded positively to partner-initiated regulation attempts but women were more even-handed (more negative) when regulation was focused on attractiveness. This gender difference did not apply to men's reactions to ambitiousness-focused regulation nor was it moderated by personality and relationship variables (as predicted). However, it is an intriguing finding.

The results of Study 2 also showed that a number of personality and relationship variables were associated with the use of positive-response strategies. Multiple regression analysis suggested specifically that higher self-esteem was

associated with increased use of positive responses to partner regulations attempts. In addition, as predicted, higher relationship quality was found to be associated with lower frequencies of negative responses. Due to the correlational nature of these findings, it is inappropriate to infer a directional or causal relationship between these personality and relationship variables and response strategy use. Importantly, the associations among the personality and relationship variables found in Study 2 generally replicated prior research, lending some validity to the current study and suggesting that the sample was not unusual or atypical.

Chapter Four: General Discussion

This research investigated regulation tactics and responses within intimate relationships. I predicted that the Ideal Standards Model would provide an appropriate theoretical framework to conceptualise and evaluate aspects of self, partner and relationship focused regulation. Study 1 assessed the spontaneous use of regulation from the initiators' point of view. I hypothesised that regulation attempts would reflect the three pivotal dimensions of the Ideal Standards Model (warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resources), that men and women would differ in the frequency and importance placed on specific regulatory domains, and that interpersonal regulatory strategies would be considered to be more successful than intrapersonal strategies. These predictions were generally confirmed.

Study 2 addressed reactions to the partners' attempts to regulate warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resource in the self. I predicted that individuals would generally respond in a positive fashion to neutrally worded descriptions of partner initiated regulation, but that responses would be more negative for women when attractiveness/vitality was the focus of regulation and for men when status/resources was the focus of regulation. I also predicted that this response pattern would be moderated by levels of secure attachment, self-esteem, self-perceived mate values and implicit theories of relationships. Finally, I hypothesised that positive response strategy use would be associated with greater relationship quality with the converse being true for negative response strategy use. The results were more mixed than Study 1, but again were generally consistent with prior research and the Ideals Standards Model.

Gender Differences

As hypothesised, individuals' regulatory attempts could be successfully coded into the three dimensions of the Ideal Standards Model and displayed the predicted overall and gender-specific patterns of frequency and associated importance. Specifically, warmth/trustworthiness items were cited as the most frequent focus of regulation for either self, partner or relationship regulation for men and women. However, predicted gender differences also emerged. When asked about self-regulation, men more frequently cited status/resource attempts than women, and rated this focus of regulation as more important than that of attractiveness/vitality. When women were asked about their self-regulation, they were more likely to recall attractiveness/vitality attempts than men and rated this focus of regulation more important than that of status/resources. When participants who were asked to recall ways in which they had tried to regulate their partners the opposite pattern was found - men more frequently mentioned attractiveness/vitality attempts than women, and also rated this focus of regulation as more important than that of status/resource. When women were asked about their partner regulation, again they were more likely to recall status/resource attempts than men and rated this focus of regulation as more important than that of attractiveness/vitality.

Regulatory Success

The final prediction of Study 1, that interpersonal regulatory strategies would be associated with higher perceptions of success than intrapersonal strategies, received some provisional support using correlational methods. Results indicated a negative association between intrapersonal strategy use and perceived regulatory

success and a positive relationship between interpersonal strategy use and perceived regulatory success. These findings suggest that regulation (irrespective of focus) is more likely to be associated with perceived success when partners are involved in the process.

Regulation in an intimate relationship context is intrinsically interpersonal, as it inevitably involves both partners. Study 2 considered regulation response strategies and, as predicted, found that in general individuals' tended to respond positively to partner initiated regulation attempts. Hypothesised gender differences received partial support in that females did not follow the overall trend of responding positively when regulation was focused on changing their attractiveness. Extensive moderation analyses did not reveal the hypothesised interaction of various personality and relationship variables on response strategy use within gender. However, using multiple regression techniques I found that increased self-esteem predicted the use of positive response strategies in general, after controlling for several variables including, self-perceived attractiveness/vitality and destiny relationship theory.

I predicted that greater use of positive response strategies would be associated with increased relationship quality and that greater use of negative response strategies would be associated with lower relationship quality. This hypothesis received partial support, and suggests that poorer quality relationships are characterised by negative interpersonal processes.

These results both support and extend what is known about regulation in an intimate relationship context. They can be understood using the Ideal Standards

Model framework and theoretical stance, when integrated with the relevant literature that discusses interpersonal processes in intimate relationships. I turn to this task next.

Support and Contributions to the Ideal Standards Model

The Ideal Standards Model proposes that individuals evaluate, explain and regulate aspects of their intimate relationships depending on how closely perceptions match their ideals (ideal-perception consistency) in three pivotal domains; warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resources (Simpson et al., 2001). Much research has provided evidence for the evaluative and explanatory functions of ideal-perception consistency (e.g. Fletcher et al., 1999); however; Overall et al. (2006) produced the first empirical support of ideal-perception consistency acting as a central motivational force behind self and partner regulation. The current research has provided support and novel contributions to some of these central themes of the Ideal Standards Model.

The evolutionary foundations of the Ideal Standards Model suggests that possessing warmth/trustworthiness, attractiveness/vitality and status/resources characteristics increase mate value because they represent different aspects of reproductive fitness (Simpson et al., 2001). In a novel experimental design in this domain, Study 1 clearly demonstrated that individuals' spontaneous descriptions of self, partner and relationship focused regulation usually fell into one of the three central dimensions of the Ideal Standards Model. The Ideal Standards Model also suggests that men should place more importance on attractiveness/vitality characteristics in potential mates, compared to women, and that women place more importance on status/resource characteristics, compared to men (Simpson et al). There

are many empirical studies that have found support for this predicted gender difference (and its self mate-value equivalent) in self and partner evaluative contexts (e.g. Fletcher, 2004).

Overall et al. (2006) provides the first empirical study of gender differences in self-regulation. She found that men were more likely to regulate their status/resource characteristics than women and that women were more likely to regulate their attractiveness/vitality characteristics than men. Study 1 extended these findings, by showing the same kind of gender difference is active in both self and partner regulation. Integrating these results suggests that (a) individuals are aware of the differential importance that their partners place on these attributes and regulate themselves accordingly and (b) that individuals focus both self and partner regulatory attempts on characteristics that are important according to the sex-role stereotypes that are influenced by parental investment and strategic pluralism.

Self, Partner, and Relationship Regulatory Strategies.

Previous research has found that discrepancies in ideal-perception consistency prompts regulatory attempts and that the success of these attempts has important outcomes for relationship quality (Overall et al., 2006). Specifically, Overall et al concluded that increased regulation was associated with lower relationship satisfaction, but that this relationship was moderated by the perceived success of the regulatory attempt. These results however do not tell us what makes a regulatory attempt successful, an oversight that the current research was designed to address. Results of Study 1 indicated that such attempts are considered to be more successful when individuals involve their partners in the process. These results are similar to

studies that have found increased success in bringing about change when strategies referenced relationship opposed to individual benefits (Orina et al., 2002) and used collaborative regulation strategies (Cohen and Lichtenstein, 1990 and Tucker and Muller, 2000).

The previous literature has suggested that the perceived success of regulation can have important implications for relationship outcomes (Overall et al., 2006 and Overall et al., in press). Specifically, these kinds of studies have shown that successful regulation attempts are linked to relationship quality overtime. Integrating the results of the current research with this prior research suggests that interpersonal regulatory strategies are not only perceived to be more successful but that they also may be implicated in the development and maintenance of relationship quality.

Response Strategies to Partner Initiated Regulation.

Regulation within an intimate relationship (irrespective of the focus) involves both partners at some level, due to the interdependence of individual outcomes in this context (Thibaut and Kelly, 1959). Lewis and Butterfield (2005) suggest that regulation that is prompted by others may be more successful in an intimate relationship context, than in other social dynamics, because intimate partners are more likely to make positive attributions about the basis of the regulation (i.e attribute it to genuine care and concern) and thus respond more positively. However, Overall et al (2006) concluded that regulation attempts communicate dissatisfaction and therefore may be subject to negative partner reactions.

Study 2 provides support for the notions proposed by Lewis and Butterfield (2005) as individuals were found to generally respond in a positive manner to partner-initiated regulation attempts. Interestingly, preliminary support for gender differences in response strategy use (based loosely on the evolutionary foundations of the Ideal Standards Model) are also apparent in Study 2. In particular, women did not respond more positively when regulation was focused at changing their attractiveness. It is possible that women may be hypervigilant to their partners' perceptions of their attractiveness/vitality characteristics (compared to men) and more readily attribute regulation within this domain to their own deficits, rather than those that reflect genuine care and concern from their partners. This combined hypervigilance and negative attribution tendency may in part explain why women respond less positively to regulation attempts that are focused on changing their attractiveness.

It has been argued that specific regulation strategies can be linked to varying degrees of (perceived) success and that this may affect relationship quality. Given the dynamic nature of regulation within intimate relationships it is reasonable to suspect that responses to regulation attempts will also influence relationship outcomes. Overall et al (in press) demonstrated that responding in a diplomatic and positive manner to regulation attempts predicted more successful change and Overall et al (2006) clearly demonstrated that higher perceived success is predictive of increased relationship quality. The results of Study 2 are congruent with those findings. It is likely that negative responses to neutrally worded partner initiated regulation represents low quality relationship interactions in general. Bradbury and Fincham (1991) suggest that when relationship interactions are negative the problem-solving process is undermined and relationship satisfaction suffers as a result.

Interestingly, Study 2 found that the use of positive response strategies was associated with higher levels of self-esteem. Self-esteem is arguably one of the central elements that moderates positive bias in intimate relationships, which may represent the mechanism through which self-esteem influences response strategy choice. Murray, Holmes and Griffin (2000) found that individuals low in self-esteem tended to underestimate how positive their partners perceived them and subsequently behaved in ways that lowered their partners' originally positive views.

The recent work of Overall et al. (2006) suggests that as partner attributes become inconsistent with ideal standards (as would be the case for partners of individuals with low self-esteem who contradict initial positive appraisals) individuals seek to remedy this via regulation. However, Overall et al also concluded that increased regulatory attempts were associated with decreased relationship satisfaction when they were unsuccessful in bringing about the desired change. As individuals lower in self-esteem are more likely to respond to such regulatory efforts in a negative manner (undermining the problem-solving process) regulation may be more likely to be unsuccessful thus resulting poorer relationship outcomes. Therefore, it is possible that individuals low in self-esteem trigger a self-defeating process whereby they inadvertently stimulate partner-initiated change attempts and subsequently respond to these attempts in a way that makes them less likely to succeed, the outcome being lower relationship quality.

Limitations and Caveats

The current research showed that interpersonal regulation strategies were perceived to be more successful than intrapersonal strategies, which suggests that this success may be linked to relationship outcomes. However, previous literature has shown that initial judgments of success do not necessarily translate into long-term change, which is responsible for relationship outcomes (Overall et al., in press). Longitudinal research is required to investigate the possibility of persistent success and subsequent relationship outcomes of interpersonal regulatory strategies. Overall et al offers the first longitudinal research in this area. However, this research only addresses longitudinal effects of partner focused regulation - subsequent research would benefit from including self and relationship regulation in its design.

Future research could also offer advancement by incorporating behavioural and dyadic components in their research designs. Although the current studies addressed both sides of regulation (the initiator and the target) this was not an integrated process, which may have resulted in important variables and moderating mechanisms being lost in the process.

Behavioural and dyadic approaches would also result in more individualised representations of regulation, rather than the hypothetical and unspecific vignettes designed for Study 2. It is possible that the hypothetical nature of regulation attempts described in Study 2 was perceived to be either irrelevant to participants' actual relationships or were not salient enough (as may have been the case in using the term 'ambitious') to evoke an assessment of their likely reaction. This may account for the lack of support for the hypothesised moderating variables and gender differences. It is

also possible that individuals' response strategy choices may be moderated by variables that were outside the scope of Study 2.

Conclusion

As previously described the current research has its limitations. However, it also has several strengths. In a novel move, Study 1 considered self, partner and relationship regulation concurrently and produced spontaneous descriptions of regulation within each of these areas. This design allowed for a systematic comparison of men's and women's experiences of regulation in the three areas and produced unprompted descriptions, which provides important evidence for fundamental aspects of the Ideal Standards Model. Additional strengths of the current studies also include the consideration of specific regulatory strategies and an investigation of individuals' responses to partner-initiated regulation.

The current studies both support what is known about regulation in this context and offer unique evidence for theoretical explanations that are still in their beginning stages of empirical study. The present research contributes toward the understanding of how individuals attempt regulation within intimate relationship contexts and the dynamic processes that are involved.

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Appendix A: Category Descriptions from the Ideal Standards Model

Warmth/Trustworthiness; understanding, supportive, considerate, kind, good listener, sensitive, trustworthy, warm, affectionate, reliable, friendly, communicative, honest, mature, stable, romantic, broad-,indeed, easygoing, self-aware, generous, committed, caring, respectful, loyal, stable, monogamous, in love, equality, sharing, accepting, compromise.

Attractiveness/Vitality; adventurous, nice body, outgoing, sexy, attractive, good lover, active lifestyle, athletic, confident, independent, ambitious, interesting, spontaneous, good fun, good sense of humour, assertive, challenging, independent, passionate, relaxed, similar personality, similar interests.

Status/Resources; financially secure, nice house or apartment, appropriate ethnicity, successful, dresses well, appropriate age.

Appendix B: Response Strategy Descriptions

Negative Direct; I would express anger and irritation, I would criticise my partner's opinion, I would be sarcastic towards my partner, I would argue with my partner.

Negative Indirect; I would make my partner feel guilty, I would respond in an emotional way, such as sulking or crying, I would appeal to my partner's love and concern for me, I would point out the negative consequences of my partner trying to change me.

Positive Direct; I would help my partner to see the situation from my point of view, I would think logically about the issue, weighing up the pros and cons of possible solutions, I would think about the issue rationally, in a non-biased fashion.

Positive Indirect; I would encourage my partner to express his or her feelings about the issue, I would validate my partner's views, I would respond using humour, I would point out the positive characteristics of my partner.